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SAN DIEGO COMMUNITY

San Diego Community Unites to Commemorate Armenian Genocide

By Robert Deranian, ANC-SD

SAN DIEGO—A coalition of Armenian American organizations in San Diego joined together on the evening of April 24 to commemorate the Armenian Genocide. Participating organizations included the Armenian Assembly of America, AGBU, ARS, ARF, ANC, Homenetmen, Ararat Guild, Triple-X, Knights of Vartan, UCSD-ASA and the St. John Garabed Church. The event, which was held at St. John Garabed Armenian Church of San Diego drew a large crowd representing different generations of Armenians. Welcoming remarks were delivered by the Master of Ceremonies Steve Kradjian who, throughout the evening, provided a dignified and sincere presence.

The commemoration began at 6:30 PM with a memorial service conducted by Father Datev Tatoulian in the church sanctuary. The somber and respectful mood of the requiem service reflected the deep feelings of sorrow that link San Diego Armenians with Armenians throughout the world in remembering the suffering of their ancestors. The church choir sang beautifully to contribute to the emotional service.

Remembrance and the call to action set the tone for the evening. The MC emphasized the call to action through a petition being passed around to the audience by the ANC San Diego chapter. The petition supports House Resolution 193 which advocates US Congressional recognition of the Armenian Genocide through commemoration of the 15th anniversary of US implementation of the Genocide Convention. The legislation, which specifically cites the Armenian Genocide, calls on the US to prevent future genocides by learning from the lessons of past genocides.

The evening continued with memorable presentations from the University of California San Diego Armenian Student Association. Stella Gukasyan recited a poem composed by her sister Meri titled, "UNRECOGNIZED." Stella's passionate recital of her sister's poem reminded the



Congressman Filner (third from right) with ANC San Diego members at the conclusion of the San Diego April 24 Genocide Commemoration

audience that the Genocide has had, and continues to have, deep meaning for continuous generations of Armenians.

The second student presentation was a masterful piano performance by Tigran Palyan. Such wonderful music from a young Armenian provides hope and encouragement that—despite the tragedy of the Genocide, the Armenian people continue to flourish.

When the sole Genocide survivor present that evening Mrs. Hagopian passed a lit candle to Tigran, the profound symbolism of the Armenian spirit going forth from generation to generation, became clear.

Guest speaker Vickie Smith Folston, author of the book, "Victoria's Secret: A conspiracy of Silence" presented personal consequences of the Armenian Genocide by detailing her Grandmother's concealment of her Armenian identity.

Vickie, who did not even know what an Armenian was who for most of her life, discovered her Armenian heritage by learning about how her Grandmother was forced to deny her own Armenian heritage. It was a powerful reminder of just how devastating

the Genocide was, not only during the terrible time of carnage when the actual killings and deportations occurred, but also with the denial that continues to this day.

The evening culminated with a special guest appearance by Congressman Bob Filner representing California's 51st district. Special Assistant to the Congressman Willy Blair introduced Congressman Filner by speaking about his character and integrity. He reminded the audience that regardless of political ramifications, Congressman Filner remains adamant about the reality of the Armenian Genocide. Congressman Filner elaborated, noting that as a History Professor by profession, adhering firmly to the truth of the Armenian Genocide is of paramount importance to him. He stressed the necessity of remembering the lessons of the Armenian Genocide in order to prevent future genocides. During the reception that followed, many people met the Congressman to learn more about his conscientious stance on the Armenian Genocide.